



Catholic Faith, Life & Creed

Doctrinal Catechesis Sessions for adults based on
the Church Year, the Liturgy, & the Sunday Scriptures

Breaking Open the Word

by Mary Birmingham

12th Sunday in Ordinary Time | Year C



The raising of the cross by James Tissot, 1894



Begin with the Sign of the Cross

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Opening Prayer

Option 1. Use Opening Prayer from the Sunday Liturgy.

Option 2.

Oblatio Sui

*Lord, take all my freedom.
Accept my memory,
my understanding,
And my entire will.
You have given me all that I have or hold dear.
I return it to you,
that it may be governed by your will.
Give me only your grace
and the gift of loving you,
And I will be rich enough;
I will ask for nothing more.
Amen.*

**Catholic
Faith, Life
& Creed**
Version 2.0

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Breaking Open the
Word worksheets
connect with *Catholic
Faith, Life, & Creed*
Doctrinal Sessions.

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Liturgical Context

- ▶ Today Jesus asks his disciples who they think he is. He reminds them that they must take up their cross and follow him. They must follow in the footsteps of the Master. We too are asked the same question: “Who is Jesus for us?” Are we willing to follow his example and embrace the Paschal Mystery in our lives?

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two, and then surface insights in the wider group.

- ▶ What spoke to your heart in today’s liturgy?
- ▶ What reading, symbol, music, homily, spoke to you and why did it speak to you?
- ▶ What touched you the most in today’s Gospel?

If time is a consideration, omit reflection on one of the readings.

Reading 1: Zechariah 12, 10-11

- ▶ Zechariah speaks of a future confrontation between God and evil. He promises that following a period of trial, persecution, suffering and testing God will be victorious in his final plan of salvation.
- ▶ People will be purified through the suffering they will endure and will repent for the sin in their lives.
- ▶ Repentance will bring about a renewal of God’s covenant.
- ▶ God will not abandon the people in their suffering. He will walk through it with them.
- ▶ God will send a leader to shepherd the people. This leader will be killed and mourned as though he were an only child.
- ▶ Isaiah referred to a suffering servant and Zechariah alludes to a shepherd.
- ▶ The death of the shepherd ushers in the last age in which God converts hearts and calls people to repentance.
- ▶ Both Isaiah and Zechariah influenced early Christian thinking. The shepherd who was thrust through and servant who died for the many were both primary images of Jesus Christ.
- ▶ Zechariah insists that people must undergo persecution in order to be purified of sin.
- ▶ See Word and Worship Workbook, Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time by Mary Birmingham (Paulist Press) for further information.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to one or more of the following questions in groups of two, and then surface brief insights in the wider group. Catechist responds with a “brief” story from his or her life. See appendix #1 for an example.

- ▶ What does Zechariah teach us about the mystery of suffering? What does it accomplish in us according to the prophet and what will it bring about?
- ▶ Have you ever had an experience of suffering in which you experience some sort of conversion or change of heart or growth?
- ▶ What image of Christ most speaks to your life situation at this time—Jesus the Shepherd or Jesus the suffering servant? Explain the reason for your answer.
- ▶ How might this story invite a response in your life today?
- ▶ What is the good news in this reading?

Second Reading: Galatians 3, 26-29

- ▶ One issue in Paul’s letter to the Galatians concerned how the Law related to Gentile believers. Some felt they were subject to the Mosaic Law and others did not.
- ▶ Another issue concerned the role of the Law in salvation. Paul insisted the Law could not save; salvation is won only through faith in the Paschal Mystery of Jesus Christ.
- ▶ Status, distinction and division have no place in the Christian community. All are equal in the eyes of God.
- ▶ Paul references a baptismal prayer that expresses unity in Christ.
- ▶ Paul also makes reference to the Genesis story in which God created men and women as equal partners.
- ▶ The garment was an allusion to the practice of putting on a robe of belonging. When a devotee of a certain religion donned a robe it signified they belonged to the god of that particular religion. The garment signified a changed reality—a new direction—changed behavior.
- ▶ Paul’s vision of leadership was the house church. Unity was the hallmark of the house church. Each house church had a leader but the vision of leadership was anything but hierarchical. Paul’s vision of leadership included reciprocity, collegiality and collaboration.
- ▶ Members of the body determined the style and manner of leadership. The appointed leader would then carry out the wishes of the community.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to one or more of the following questions in groups of two and then surface brief insights in the wider group. Catechist responds with a “brief” story or reflection from his or her life. See appendix #2 for an example.

- ▶ Very often we like to think we are more enlightened than our ancient Christian counterparts. We think we have been formed by the Gospel and live according to its imperatives. Thus, we do not have status issues or divisions in our communities. The truth is all the issues that were prevalent in the ancient communities are prevalent today. There are status issues. There are people who enjoy privileged status in our communities. Homeless people most often would not be welcome in our assemblies. People of means very often are given special honor. Have you ever noticed such an attitude in your parish? In what way (if any) do you participate in such attitudes? How might such attitudes be challenged? What can you do to change them?
- ▶ What does it mean to you that the people of God are called to unity? What gets in the way of unity? What way, if any, do you promote unity in your community? In what way, if any, are you an obstacle to such unity? What sinful behaviors get in the way of unity in a community?
- ▶ What is the call to conversion and change inherent in this reading?
- ▶ What is the Good News in this reading?

Gospel: Luke 9: 18-24

Read or summarize the Gospel, perhaps provide a copy of the text for further reflection.

Gospel Exegesis

Please note: catechist may intersperse the questions at the end of the exegesis throughout your presentation where appropriate.) Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions before presenting the exegesis.

- ▶ What specifically touched you in this Gospel?
- ▶ What does this Gospel mean to you?

- ▶ During these weeks of summer Ordinary Time Luke places Jesus and his disciples on the journey to Jerusalem.
- ▶ Luke wants to insure that every believer understands it is a journey every follower of Jesus must take.
- ▶ Every Christian by virtue of baptism is called to take up his or her cross and follow in the footsteps of Jesus.

- ▶ Every Christian is called to preach the Good News of salvation.
- ▶ Every Christian is called to obedient submission to the will of God.
- ▶ In today's Gospel Jesus did what he frequently did in Luke's Gospel—he went off alone to pray.
- ▶ Prayer alerts the reader that something significant is about to take place.
- ▶ Luke wants his audience to understand that Jesus is not only a great prophet who understands the human heart, but he also can foretell his own pending death and resurrection.
- ▶ Luke said: "Then he said to *all*." The use of *all* is intentional. Luke makes no mistake about who his intended audience is—*all* is everyone who calls himself or herself a disciple.
- ▶ The story implies that Jesus is talking only to the Twelve Apostles. However his use of *all* indicates that his target audience in the exchange is everyone who calls Jesus Lord.
- ▶ The rigors and demands of radical discipleship are for *all* disciples.
- ▶ To be a Christian means that one is willing to take up one's cross and follow Jesus—that is—embrace the Paschal Mystery of Christ.
- ▶ Up to this point Jesus has been very successful in his ministry. Things are about to change. Jesus will soon endure persecution, rejection and suffering for the sake of his mission.
- ▶ Jesus will soon learn what it means to endure the purifying fire of human suffering.
- ▶ Through his own suffering Jesus teaches us what it means to lose everything, even one's life, for the sake of the many.
- ▶ He teaches us the virtue of selfless martyrdom.
- ▶ Such purifying suffering creates detachment and a willingness to submit one's will completely to God. Detachment as a result of purifying fire is only possible with the illuminating grace of God—the presence of God within the suffering soul.
- ▶ Detachment from things of this world is a necessary path to the cross.
- ▶ Taking up one's cross as expressed in this Gospel does not refer to one's daily trials and tribulations. The self-denial Jesus calls for in this Gospel reflects the attitude of a person waiting to be executed. A person waiting to die has nothing left to embrace in this world but the cross of Christ—all else is gone.
- ▶ God must be the focus of the disciple's life. He or she is to enter into a kenosis—a self-emptying that makes room for God's total and complete indwelling.
- ▶ Suffering is an invitation to abandon one's life to God's care.
- ▶ If we, faithful disciples of Christ, could fix the suffering we endure we would; but we cannot.
- ▶ Suffering is an invitation to allow God to be sovereign in our lives. On our own we can do nothing.
- ▶ Disciples are called to give up any attachment or distraction that would keep them from their appointed task in the kingdom of God.
- ▶ Jesus was preparing them for the day when they would be thoroughly rejected and stand alone with no advocates to speak on their behalf.
- ▶ They must pray for the strength to remain strong, stand firm and remain faithful

to the Gospel Jesus preached.

- ▶ Peter comes to a crossroads with his question posed to Jesus. Peter's confession that Jesus is the Christ pinpoints a new stage in the development and maturity of the disciples.
- ▶ The disciples would eventually weaken and fail, especially Peter. It would not be until after the resurrection that the mystery would become more intelligible. However, Jesus' question to Peter and Peter's confession signals a shift in the mission of the disciples.
- ▶ Jesus' preparation of his disciples picked up momentum. Even though he told them of his pending death, they could not grasp the significance. Experience is the only teacher. He had to endure what he told them he would endure before they fully comprehended what was taking place in their midst.
- ▶ They had to get to the point of Peter's confession before they could even be prepared.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to one or more of the following questions in small groups of four. Use the last three or four minutes to surface the insights in the wider group. Catechist begins by sharing story from his or her life. See appendix #3 for an example. (@ Ten-twelve minutes)

- ▶ What are the primary themes in this Gospel?
- ▶ What is Jesus' primary message for his disciples? To what is Jesus calling his disciples? There is an inherent call to conversion—what is it?
- ▶ What does Jesus want to teach his disciples? Why all the urgency?
- ▶ Is there similar urgency for us? If so, why?
- ▶ What does this Gospel teach us about the Christian mission?
- ▶ Is this Gospel relevant today as it was then? If so, why? What is Jesus preparing us for today?
- ▶ What would be your response if you were on that same journey with Jesus and he told you that what he was asking you to do would require that you be rejected and endure persecution and suffering? How would you respond? In what way would you similarly be rejected today or know similar persecution and suffering?
- ▶ What does Jesus' message of non-violence have to teach us? Why is that an important message in our world today?
- ▶ What are the implications of this Gospel? What is the challenge?

Catechist invites participants to silently reflect on the following question.

- ▶ After reflection on today's liturgy, what one thing is God asking of you at this time in your life?
- ▶ What obstacles stand in the way of following God's call?

CONCLUDING PRAYER

Repeat OPENING PRAYER for this session OR
Minor rite: Blessing: 95-97.

APPENDIX

#1. I treasure both images of Christ—Shepherd who was pierced and the Suffering Servant. Both have continually walked the road of suffering with me and with my family. They were there in my darkest moments as well as in our most joyful moments. I knew Christ the Shepherd and Christ the Suffering Servant understood the frustration, the sorrow and the feeling of being abandoned by the God who my rational mind insisted loves me but whose silence seemed to communicate complete abandonment. Both images strengthened me in those times I thought I was at the end of my rope. As Shepherd, Christ never let me wander off when I resisted facing the struggles in my life.

It was Christ the Shepherd and Suffering Servant who sustained us in those dark hours of 9/11 when we waited for hours to learn the fate of our daughter who we knew was entering the World Trade Center just as the first plane crashed into the building. Christ was with us in the utter joy we experienced to learn she was alive, but the absolute grief over the loss of lives that day and the destruction we experienced in the days following.

It was the Suffering Servant who held us close to his heart as we mourned the loss of my eldest daughter's babies due to miscarriage. It was definitely the Suffering Servant who has kept our family together and strengthened our bond as we have endured a decade of living with a child with severe mental illness. Christ walked that same road of suffering and his consolation is borne of experience—one who knows what struggle means—God with us.

#2. Unfortunately people of privilege are often treated with more deference than people with no means. We easily dismiss the latter and give undue attention to the former. It is an insidious problem that needs our diligent attention. The first place to begin the process of weeding out such behaviors is in our own hearts. We are called to recognize when we fall prey to them. Since they are common attitudes in society and in our culture it is very easy to perpetuate them. Addressing the problem sometimes requires that we speak truth to prevailing power structures.

A man approached me at a workshop I was giving. He was in tears. He told me that he was a sponsor to a catechumen in his parish. The week before the rite of election the man he was sponsoring told him that he thought the idea of Christ present in the Eucharist was nothing but hocus pocus and that he was only becoming Catholic for his wife.

The sponsor was incredulous and begged the man to reconsider and choose not to go forward for election. The man refused. The sponsor went to the director of the catechumenate and told her what the man had said to him. He further told her that he could not in conscience continue as his sponsor. The director chastised the man, told him not to make waves and to continue as the man's sponsor. The man then went to the pastor and was told the same thing but with one more caveat. The pastor told him that he simply must continue as his sponsor and that he should not tell anyone about what

the man said to him because the pastor did not want to upset the man since he was one of the parish's biggest donors.

The man was devastated. He did what the pastor told him to do. As he stood before the Church and before God at the rite of election to attest to this man's readiness he wept over the lie he was participating in. From that day forward the man swore that he would never knowingly put his integrity on the line again.

St. Paul insisted that all are equal in the kingdom of God. When one person is exalted above the others simply because he is the biggest donor in the parish, we have lost sight of why Jesus came and with whom he spent most of his time.

#3. Jesus is ultimately calling his disciples into intimate union with him—to understand that he is their Source. The Christian mission cannot go forth on human steam alone. It requires the guidance of the Holy Spirit. It requires that we know our Source—that we forge an intimate relationship with Christ who knows us best and loves us most.

Each of us is gifted for mission. I have had the privilege of traveling throughout this country to experience the work of God in parishes all over the United States. I am humbled by the faithful work of God's people. Every time I go somewhere I come home thinking that if only I could be as zealous and as faith-filled as the people to whom I just ministered I would truly be a loving, effective faithful minister of the Gospel. We are so blessed to have so many committed disciples to do the work of Jesus Christ in the world. I learn so much from them!

I know this work is demanding. There are times I want to stop and just enjoy my family. There are times, like Elijah, that I want to throw in the towel and say, "Enough!" Yet every time I am thus tempted, the Spirit of God gently taps me on the shoulder and says, "No basking in self-pity! It is time to get moving again. I have another job for you to do!" Up and away I go. I am always amazed at how thoroughly touched and moved I am by God's work in the world. I am very thankful that the Spirit does not give up on me and refuses to listen when I say, "Enough!"



Connecting Liturgy with Catholic Doctrine

Possible doctrinal themes that flow from this week's
Liturgy of the Word and Eucharist

Kingdom of God
Evangelization
Sacrament of Orders
Faith

Prayer
Salvation
Ecumenism
Eucharist Series

Other themes may be chosen as well--choose from the scope and sequence chart and create your own connecting statement. The following statements make the appropriate connections between the doctrinal issue you have chosen and the liturgy of the day.

KINGDOM OF GOD

Jesus came to establish the kingdom. Today he tells his disciples the implications of kingdom living. He reminds them that the road is not easy. He reminds them that they too will be rejected. Those who are called to establish the reign of God are to follow the example of Jesus. They are to detach from worldly concerns and consider the kingdom of God their top priority. This section of Luke's Gospel focuses on Jesus' mission to establish the reign of God and prepare his disciples for his absence. Today's doctrinal session will focus on the KINGDOM OF GOD.

EVANGELIZATION

Jesus prepares his disciples to establish his kingdom after his death. He is teaching them what it means to be a disciple and what will be expected of them. Their primary goal is to preach the Kingdom. Thus, he is teaching them about the importance of EVANGELIZATION. Today our extended session will focus on what the Church teaches about EVANGELIZATION.

SACRAMENT OF HOLY ORDERS

Today Elisha is commissioned for service in God's prophetic mission. Jesus reminds those who would take up the mantle of kingdom ministry that they are to detach from all that would keep them focused on their former life. These themes very naturally invite us to focus on the sacrament of Holy Orders that is a commissioning for ministry in God's service par excellence. Thus today's extended session will focus on the SACRAMENT OF HOLY ORDERS.

FAITH

All the readings are a call to FAITH. No one can go forward to establish the kingdom of God without radical faith in God. No one is able to detach from his or her worldly possessions in order to promote God's reign without faith. Thus, today we will focus our attention on what the Church teaches about FAITH.

PRAYER

Jesus reminds his disciples that union with him is their top priority. He gives the example throughout Luke's Gospel of what drives his mission—intimacy with his Father. If we are to be in complete union with Jesus then we must develop a consistent prayer life. Today our extended session will focus on PRAYER.

SALVATION

Jesus teaches his disciples about the kingdom he came to establish. He teaches them what they can expect. They now will be the messengers of his salvation. These chapters in Luke's Gospel serve as a catechism on the salvation Jesus came to offer. Today's liturgy invites us to reflect on the great gift of salvation we have been given through God's Son, Jesus Christ. Thus, today our extended session will focus on the mystery of SALVATION.

ECUMENISM

Jesus is preparing his disciples to establish the kingdom of God after his death. We are to continue that mission today. Part of Jesus' mission requires that we join forces with other Christians to work in unity to establish the reign of God. It is thus important that we understand what the Church teaches us about ecumenism—how we approach other non-Catholic religions. Thus, today's extended session will focus on Church teaching regarding ECUMENISM.

EUCCHARIST SERIES:

Our premier celebration of the Paschal Mystery—the life, passion, death, resurrection, ascension sending of the Spirit is made manifest and re-presented for us in the Eucharistic liturgy. Today we will focus on part ____ of the Eucharistic Series.